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FORESTS, POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION, AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLE: A FRAMEWORK FOR PARTNERSHIP AND ACTION

P.N. Duinker*, J.K. Naysmith*, and J.J. Crichlow*

INTRODUCTION

Because of an identified need for professional education and technical training for natural resource managers for First Nations, a framework for partnership and action has been defined in cooperation with Aboriginal people. As Hopwood et al. stated, "... Aboriginal groups are exercising control over natural resources on large areas and will have a strong voice in resource management on other lands in their traditional use areas. This means more trained Aboriginal foresters, wildlife managers, range managers, and other professionals, technicians, and workers are required."¹

The objectives of the current project were:

1. To define a framework of considerations that could be used by any institution contemplating delivery of postsecondary forestry and natural resources education involving Aboriginal peoples and concepts,² and
2. Using the Lakehead University Faculty of Forestry as a case study, to explore a range of options for delivering postsecondary forestry education that meets the needs of Aboriginal communities.³

As a need for education and training for professional-level careers was expressed, this project focused on postsecondary education. However, the framework was designed not only for new educational programs. In fact, its greatest value

may come from guiding the redesign and enhancement of existing forestry educational programs.

This note will provide an overview of the framework that was created, and highlight the principal requirements for establishing a successful Aboriginal postsecondary educational program.

APPROACH

Two workshops were organized to solicit input from individuals with expertise in a range of fields: namely, Aboriginal culture and learning styles, forestry in or near Aboriginal communities, and postsecondary education and training in forestry. These workshops, held in 1994 and 1995, played a central role in the project. The purpose of the first workshop was to review the structure and details of a framework for designing Aboriginal forestry education and training at the postsecondary level. The second workshop was designed to review and revise the framework to more fully meet the needs of Aboriginal people.

PROJECT FRAMEWORK

The framework consists of three parts:

1. A goal for postsecondary forestry education relating to Aboriginal people and concepts.

* Faculty of Forestry, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario.

¹ Hopwood et al. 1993. Final Report. Aboriginal forestry training and employment review. Phase I. National Aboriginal Forestry Association, Ottawa, ON. 81 p.

² see Erasmus, G. 1989. A native viewpoint. p. 92-98 in M. Hummel, ed. Endangered Spaces: The Future for Canada's Wilderness. Key Porter Books, Toronto, ON. 275 p.

³ see Lakehead University. 1992. Native education strategy. A submission to the Ministry of Colleges and Universities. Thunder Bay, ON. 88 p.



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2. A set of principles and assumptions to guide thinking and provide a context for proposals.
3. A process of partnership development that includes a) an exploratory phase to determine the needs to be met by programs, b) a definition and design phase to develop programs to a state of readiness for students, and c) an implementation phase to deliver and evaluate programs and nurture long-term relationships.
11. A successful program will recognize and accommodate the potentially unique learning styles and needs of Aboriginal students, and provide appropriate support services.
12. Aboriginal foresters must be trained to work with and under a variety of forest tenures and management arrangements.
13. It is assumed that partners will be working with their current resources, because new resources, especially financial, may not be available.
14. Role models for Aboriginal forestry students will serve as powerful incentives for excellence in academic performance.

PROJECT GOAL

The following goal emerged from the first workshop:

The goal of the framework is to encourage and guide the development and delivery of forest-related education with Aboriginal content that meets the needs of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and the standards of the educational institution.

PRINCIPLES AND ASSUMPTIONS

The following principles and assumptions were proposed as a foundation for development and delivery of postsecondary Aboriginal forestry educational programs:

1. Aboriginal forestry is community oriented, integrated, and sets forest practices in a particular cultural context.
2. Successful programs can be designed and delivered only through strong partnerships that involve all relevant parties.
3. Programs will be most successful when they integrate education for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and address both the forestry educational requirements of Aboriginal students and an awareness of Aboriginal values and knowledge among non-Aboriginal students.
4. Programs must be sensitive to Aboriginal culture and recognize cultural diversity among Aboriginal peoples.
5. Programs need to foster mutual learning that draws on both traditional and scientific knowledge.
6. All parties share a responsibility to identify and create employment opportunities for graduates.
7. Aboriginal cultural identity must be reinforced when possible.
8. Aboriginal forestry is best understood in the context of Aboriginal community socioeconomic development.
9. It is vital that all parties, particularly Aboriginal leaders, educators, and employers, have realistic expectations of what graduates can accomplish.
10. A variety of educational mechanisms will be needed for a successful and comprehensive program.

A PROCESS OF PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The main operating principle for this project is one of partnership. Extensive initial consultations will strengthen and sustain Aboriginal interest in forestry education and orient faculty members toward Aboriginal thoughts regarding the forest.

Exploring the Potential

The first task of the key partners is to discover how their respective goals can be served by working together to develop and participate in the delivery of programs. To work successfully, it is necessary to define the parameters of each of the partners' needs, and to see how these may require modification to form a successful union. Early work must focus upon building a foundation for detailed program design, development, and delivery.

A minimum of two key partners, Aboriginal people and a postsecondary educational institution, are required for Aboriginal forestry education. Other partners who should be encouraged to participate and contribute include:

- nongovernment organizations (NGOs), such as the National Aboriginal Forestry Association;⁴
- provincial government agencies, such as ministries of education, natural resources, environment, and tourism;
- federal government agencies, such as Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Natural Resources Canada, and Parks Canada;
- the private sector, such as forest products companies, forest management consultants, and forestry equipment and materials suppliers; and associations, such as the Ontario Forest Industries Association;³
- professional associations, such as the Ontario Professional Foresters' Association and the Canadian Institute of Forestry; and
- other university faculties and departments, such as indigenous learning, outdoor recreation, sociology, biology, and nursing.

⁴ Ontario Forest Industries Association. 1993. Ontario Forest Industries Association guiding principles and code of forest practices. Toronto, ON. 12 p.

Sustained consultations must be undertaken among the partners, and the two lead partners must develop a joint protocol for discussions. This protocol should be based on principles of equal partnership and mutual respect, and consensus-based decision making should be used. Patience, diligence, and a willingness to compromise are vital to a productive process, and will lead to a successful outcome even if progress is occasionally slow.

When the partners agree that a sufficiently firm basis has been laid for detailed program delivery to begin, each partner will feel confident about agreed-upon philosophies and commitments. At this stage a memorandum of understanding between the two key parties would give legitimacy and direction to the detailed discussions yet to be undertaken.

Program Definition, Design, and Development

This stage of discussion will concentrate on what will be taught and how that knowledge will be delivered;⁵ who the students will be; how they will be brought into the program; the ongoing role of the Aboriginal community; and program resources. Some of the main questions that must be answered at this time include:

1. What have Aboriginal people identified as their knowledge requirements regarding forests and their management?
2. Have both parties defined the needs of non-Aboriginal students for knowledge about Aboriginal forestry?
3. At what educational level can the identified needs be most appropriately met?
4. How are students expected to gain the knowledge and skills in Aboriginal forestry that the partnership has defined and incorporated into course content?
5. What kinds of changes will be required in current programs to satisfy identified needs, such as:
 - incorporating Aboriginal thinking and examples into one or more existing courses;
 - developing one or more new courses specifically dedicated to Aboriginal forestry concepts;
 - development of one or more courses on nonforestry Aboriginal subjects, to be taken as electives by forestry students;
 - research projects and/or undergraduate theses in Aboriginal forestry;
 - co-op programs where the work-term employer is an Aboriginal community or institution, or where work is done in an Aboriginal community;
 - a minor emphasis in Aboriginal forestry, consisting of a series of courses that highlight Aboriginal forestry; or
 - a full program on Aboriginal forestry delivered at any level.

Efforts must be undertaken, especially by Aboriginal communities, to identify potential forestry students, stimulate their interest in studying forestry at the postsecondary level, prepare them for entry into such programs, support them during their course of study, and continue supporting and encouraging them after graduation.

For Aboriginal forestry education initiatives to remain successful, the partnership between the Aboriginal communities and the educational institution must be maintained. This can be accomplished by:

- good communications
- monitoring and evaluating programs
- continuing education and extension programs
- recruitment and mentoring
- alumni services
- refinement of the Aboriginal forestry concept

CONCLUSIONS

The importance of Aboriginal forestry in Canada is growing as Aboriginal people gain more responsibility for forest management. This is creating an increased demand for Aboriginal resource managers. Similarly, practising foresters require training to implement new management perspectives.

Aboriginal forestry is an emerging concept that is not yet well defined. However, Aboriginal forestry education is needed now. As such, it will have to be developed in a flexible manner and refined as the concept of Aboriginal forestry evolves.

The development and delivery of Aboriginal forestry education must be accomplished as a partnership endeavor, so it is vital that Aboriginal people play a key role from the beginning. Possibilities for advanced education in Aboriginal forestry are limitless, and could range from incorporating Aboriginal forestry concepts into existing courses to specifically designed programs delivered to Aboriginal students in their own community or on university campuses. In addition to academic programs, students on campus may need specially targeted support services.

The present framework has been developed in consultation with the partners who will eventually be active in an Aboriginal forestry educational program. It will evolve and be improved as open and creative minds develop new ideas.

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⁵ McCarthy, B. 1987. The 4MAT system: Teaching to learning styles with right/left mode techniques. EXCEL Inc., Barrington, IL. 220 p.

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Natural Resources Canada
Canadian Forest Service-Sault Ste. Marie
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P.O. Box 490
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